

Soldiers Of The War Of The Revolution (1775-83) In Clay Co.

(By Cornelius F. Posson.)

During the years 1921, 1922 and 1923, the Indiana Society of the Sons of the American Revolution conducted a state-wide research with reference to the soldiers of the American Revolution who were known to have spent their last days in Indiana, and who, supposedly, were buried within our borders.

During two of those years, the writer was President of the state society, and was in charge of this research work during the entire three-year period. It was learned that as many as 1500 Revolutionary soldiers probably lie buried in Indiana soil. During the first two years of the period, the writer was a resident of Brazil, and naturally gave some special thought to the subject in Clay county.

This paper is intended to be a compilation of all information obtained at that time regarding soldiers of the American Revolution who are known to have lived in Clay County, or who are reported to have resided there, with such facts as have been obtainable regarding each. It is submitted at the request of D. Finley, president of the newly-organized Clay County Historical Society, who states that a committee has been chosen to make a research of the subject now at hand.

The writer, is careful, therefore, to present all data obtained from all authentic sources, believing that this compilation may serve as a reliable basis and beginning point upon which to found the proposed research.

The study of this subject is most interesting and alluring (as indeed all matters of local history are). And it is, at this late day, most difficult. These pioneers were often buried in private family burial plots on their own farms, and the graves were often marked with rude, sandstone slabs that did not endure. Thus the location of some of the graves of the early days has been entirely lost, and some of the ancient family burial plots have passed, with the farms, into other hands, and have, themselves, been obliterated by the plough.

Other of our pioneers were buried in cemeteries that are now no longer used, but are found off from the main highways of travel, over-grown with weeds and brambles, and sadly neglected. In such places as these, if we will worm our way through the entangling myrtle and the stinging briars, we may, perhaps, come upon some time-worn tombstone, whose ancient inscription, if we can decipher it, will tell us that it guards the last resting-place of a patriot of the early wars.

And in some of the cemeteries, well-kept and still in use for present-day burials, are found the graves of soldiers who fought in the War of the Revolution. So search for them where you may.

On June 5, 1834, the senate of the United States adopted a resolution, calling upon the Secretary of War to prepare a list of all pensioners under the Act of Congress of May 15, 1828, "for the relief of the surviving officers and soldiers of the Revolution," and the supplementary act of June 7, 1832. The list included soldiers of the Continental line, and regulars, state troops, militia and volunteers. For the state of Indiana, 809 names are shown in the list, of which number, four only are shown for Clay county. This list is generally known as the 1835 list of pensioners.

The four names which the 1835 list shows for Clay county, are: David Danner, Lawrence Thompson, Benjamin Wheeler, John Williams.

Mention of each of these patriots will be made later in this text.

In 1841, there was printed, in connection with the publication of the sixth census of the United States (1840), a list of pensioners, which list referred to all the pensioners on the U. S. Pension Rolls in 1840, on account of services rendered to the U. S. prior to that date. This list was compiled from the returns of the District Marshals, under the act for taking the sixth census, and without reference to, or comparison with the records of the Pension Bureau. This list is commonly known as the 1840 list of pensioners. In many instances, it gives the age of the pensioner as of June 1st, 1840, the

name of the township in which he resided, and the name of the head of the family with whom he was residing at that time.

For Clay county, Indiana, seven names are shown, two of which are names also shown in the 1835 list above. The list is as follows:

John Wheeler, Bowling Green twp., age 56

Benjamin Wheeler, Washington twp., age 92

Michael Crooks, Jackson twp., age 80.

Lawrence Thompson, Jackson twp., age 99.

John Yocom, Posey twp., age 96.

Richard Cunningham, Posey twp., age 84.

David Christy, Sr., Perry twp., age 68.

From the ages of John Wheeler and David Christy, Sr., as given, it will be readily noted that they could not have rendered service in the War of the Revolution. They were probably soldiers of the War of 1812. Their names, therefore, should be eliminated from consideration in our research concerning Revolutionary soldiers.

Making allowance for the duplication of the names of Benjamin Wheeler and Lawrence Thompson, which appear in both the 1835 and the 1840 lists, we now have seven names. From this list of seven, we will still further eliminate the name of John Williams, for in correspondence had with the U. S. Pension Bureau concerning him, Mr. Washington Gardner, Commissioner of Pensions, advised me under date of Apr. 14, 1922, that John Williams was a resident of Greenville, Floyd county, Ind., and that in the list of 1835 "his soldier was erroneously quoted as of Clay County." This leaves six names remaining.

To these, should be added the names of two other pensioners:—

John Hopper, appearing in the 1835 pension list as a resident of Orange county, Ind.

William Oard, shown in the 1835 pension list as a resident of Parke county, Ind.

The reasons for including these two pensioners in the list of Clay county Revolutionary soldiers, will be given later in the text, where each patriot is treated separately.

Many soldiers of the Revolutionary war did not receive pensions, some never having made application therefor, and therefore, a list of the Revolutionary pensioners in any

county falls far short of being a complete list of the Revolutionary soldiers residing in that county. Throughout the state of Indiana as a whole, our research reveals the fact that but few more than one-half of the veterans of the Revolution in Indiana appear on the Indiana Pension rolls.

To the names of the eight pensioners already listed in this article we are now adding the names of five men who are reported to have been in the War of the Revolution, and to have resided in Clay county, but whose names do not appear in any Indiana Pension list. Proof of actual participation of these men in the Revolutionary war, the writer feels, is yet to be established. More complete information than we now seem to have, would appear to be necessary. Their names are added to this list for purposes of research and investigation, and it is to be hoped that the result of our investigations, may be added knowledge concerning them.

The five names are:—

Benjamin Bell, Joseph Case, Obadiah Case, Amos Kelly, Latasco La Perra.

There now having been presented for our consideration, the names of thirteen men, we will next proceed to take these names up in alphabetical order, and in connection with each, to present all information that has been obtained, from all sources, down to the present time.

The first three names in the list, we will consider collectively:

Benjamin Bell—Joseph Case—Obadiah Case.

The writer has been unable to obtain any information concerning these three men other than the mere mention of them as Revolutionary soldiers made by William Travis of Middlebury, in his two-volume work, "A History of Clay County, Indiana," 1909.

In Volume I, of this history, on Page 350, the author says: "At a very early day in the history of the county, three Revolutionary soldiers, Benjamin Bell, Obadiah Case and Joseph Case, resided in the northeast part of the county, within the territory of Van Buren township, who had either died or left the county prior to the census of 1840."

Mr. Travis may be wrong in his statement that these men had either died or left the county prior to the census of 1840; for, as has already been shown, the list published in connection with the census of 1840, was a list of pensioners. The three veterans may have been Revolutionary soldiers but not pensioned, and if so, then their names would not have appeared in the 1840 list, even though they were still living within the county.

A visit to any old cemetery or family burial plots that may still be in existence in Van Buren township, might reveal added information concerning these three men; or

perhaps some descendants of theirs by the name of Bell or Case might still be remembered by some of the older residents of the township.

Michael Crooks.

Nothing has been learned concerning Michael Crooks other than what is told us by the 1840 list of Pensioners, which states that he was residing June 1st, 1840, in Jackson township, with James Harland, and was 80 years of age at that time.

If any of the descendants of James Harland are still living, or are remembered by others now living, possibly some further knowledge of this Revolutionary pensioner might be gained. I have written to the U. S. Bureau of Pensions for his service record.

Richard Cunningham.

The list of 1840 gives him as 84 years of age, as of June 1st, 1840, and as residing at that time, with Francis Cunningham, in Posey township. No other data has been obtained, but I have written to the U. S. Bureau of Pensions for his military service record, which will doubtless be received soon, and will then be submitted as a supplement to this paper.

David Danner.

The writer now has before him the military service record in the Revolutionary War of the patriot, David Danner, as given under date of Jan. 4, 1923, by H. M. Vandervoort, acting commissioner of pensions. It reads as follows:

"Enlisted Aug. or Sept. 1779. Length of service, six months. Rank, private. Service rendered under Captain Patrick Watson, in Colonel Bruce's Maryland Regiment. Residence of soldier at enlistment, Frederick county, Maryland. Date of application for pension, Oct. 29, 1833. His claim was allowed. Residence at date of application, Clay county, Indiana. Age at date of application, born in March, 1759, in Frederick county, Maryland.

There is no family data on file.

With possibly some slight variation in spelling, the name Danner is still a Clay county name. Letters written to some Clay county persons by this name, some time ago, were never replied to. Possibly descendants of the patriot, David Danner, may still be residing within the county. We have no data on David Danner, other than that which the Pension report gives.

John Hopper.

John Hopper seems to have changed his place of residence frequently during the last years of his life. Ac-

cording to the pension list of 1835, he resided in Orange county, Indiana, at the time he made application for pension. At the time of the publication of the List of 1840, he is given as residing in Martin county, being 93 years of age, as of June 1st, 1840. Mr. Jacob Luther, formerly commissioner of Clay county, says that John Hopper died in Owen county at the age of 110, and was buried in Zenor cemetery, near Bowling Green. Mr. Jacob Luther was one of the Commissioners at the time a search was being made for Revolutionary soldiers' graves, and an appropriation made for providing suitable monuments for such graves as were found.

The same statement regarding the burial place of John Hopper is made by F. W. Robertson of Brazil, in an article in the Indiana Magazine of History. On Page 160 of Volume 2 (1906), Mr. Robertson states that John Hopper is buried in Zenor cemetery, a short distance south of Bowling Green.

I have written the U. S. Bureau of Pensions for the military service record of this veteran, and hope soon to receive it.

Amos Kelly.

Several years ago, the Board of Commissioners of Clay County appropriated funds for marking, with suitable monuments, the graves of Revolutionary soldiers buried in Clay County, and an effort was made to locate Revolutionary graves within the county.

As a result of this effort two very fine monuments were erected over graves in Zenor Cemetery. Directly across the road from the Prairie City school house, just across Birch Creek from Prairie City. (It is to be noted that there are two Zenor cemeteries in Clay county—one just to the south of Bowling Green, and this one by Prairie City.)

The two graves so marked by the county commissioners are the graves of Lawrence Thompson and Amos Kelly, and on July 4th, 1906, a dedicatory ceremony of a most impressive nature was held at the graves. Major R. L. Kennedy was master of ceremonies, the Declaration of Independence was read by T. M. Robertson, an old soldier by the name of Kerr acted as chaplain, and there was an address by Peter T. Luther of Brazil, prominent attorney and Clay County pioneer. There were also brief addresses by John C. Moss of Ashboro, and Major R. L. Kennedy of Center Point. This patriotic, memorial ceremony was attended by two hundred or more interested citizens of Clay County.

SOLDIERS-IND.

The inscription on the Amos Kelly monument reads as follows: "Revolutionary Soldier."

Revolutionary Soldier.

(Amos Kelly, Died in 1842. Aged 87 Years.)

The writer has made considerable inquiry regarding the Revolutionary War record of Amos Kelly, but without result. In his account of the marking of these graves, Mr. William Travis, in his "History of Clay County," makes this statement: "Practically little is known by the present generation of Amos Kelly."

In 1921, the writer discussed the matter with one of the men who had an important part in the marking of the Kelly grave, and this gentleman practically admitted at that time that, in marking the grave of Amos Kelly, they were not fully assured that he had had Revolutionary service, and as he expressed it, inasmuch as they were marking the grave of Lawrence Thompson, nearby, they decided to give the man Kelly the benefit of the doubt and mark his grave also.

Latasco Le Perra

The spelling of the name as here given, may not be entirely right. He was a Frenchman, concerning whom, nothing is known. Mr. Jacob Luther, former Clay County Commissioner is our authority for adding the name to our list. Mr. Luther says that the man Le Perra is buried in Zenor cemetery, near Bowling Green.

William Oard

I have before me the military service record in the Revolutionary War of William Oard, as furnished me by the U. S. Bureau of Pensions. It reads as follows:

"Enlisted Feb., 1776 for 3 months, as a Private in Captain Garret Bond's Company of Colonel Jeremiah Jourdon's Maryland Regiment.

Enlisted, 1780, for 2 months in Captain John Sanford's Company of Colonel Blackburn's and Colonel Tipps' Virginia Regiments.

Enlisted, 1780, for 1 month, Officers not stated.

Resident of soldier at enlistments, St. Mary's County, Maryland and Prince William County, Virginia.

Date of application for pension, May 11, 1833. His claim was allowed.

Residence at date of application, Adams Township, Parke Co., Ind.

Age at date of application, born Sept. 22, 1754, Charles County, Maryland.

He died September 15, 1833. No data on file as to family.

There are descendants of the patriot, William Oard, now living in Parke County. I have had correspondence with one of these descendants who resides near Perth, and he tells me that his Revolutionary ancestor, William Oard, is buried in the old Hill Cemetery on West National Avenue, Brazil, and that he believes he could go to the spot. He states that the lot lies just to the right of the main drive leading from National avenue, and not so very far from the gate. I believe that the main drive to which the Oard descendant refers is now closed up, and that it was some little distance to the east of the present entrance.

An effort should be made to get this Perth gentleman to come to Brazil, and see if he can recall the spot where William Oard was buried. It is to be regretted that, when the Hill Cemetery was cleaned up a few years ago, there were dug out and removed, a number of old and un-marked headstones and footstones of graves. Some of these stones only reached a few inches above the ground and evidently were thought to be of no value, but might have been, even though un-inscribed, a means of identification to some person coming along in later years, who once was familiar with the spot.

Lawrence Thompson

The grave of Lawrence Thompson is in Zenor Cemetery, just across the road from the Prairie City school house, and was marked with a fine monument provided by the Board of County Commissioners in 1906. Monuments on this grave and the grave of Amos Kelly near by were dedicated with impressive, patriotic ceremony on July 4, 1906. See full account of this occurrence under caption "Amos Kelly" in preceding portion of this paper.

According to the inscription on the stone, both Lawrence Thompson and his wife lived to remarkable ages. The inscription is as follows:

REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER

Lawrence Thompson

of N. C.

Aged 108 Years

Martha, his wife,

Aged 105 Years.

The fact that Lawrence Thompson served in the War of Independence is well substantiated. I have this from Washington Gardner, Commissioner of Pensions, under date of March 4, 1922:

"In reply to your request of Jan-

31, for a statement of the military history of Lawrence Thompson, a soldier of the Revolutionary War, you will find below the desired information as contained in his application for pension on file in this Bureau.

Date of enlistment, 1777.

Length of service, 6 months. Discharged, December 1777.

Rank, 1st. Sergeant.

Under Captain Alfred Moore of Colonel—Moore's North Carolina Regiment.

Residence of soldier at enlistment, Rowan County, N. C.

Date of application for pension, October 29, 1833. His claim was allowed.

Residence at date of application, Clay County, Indiana.

Age at date of application, born 1755, in Dunmore County, Virginia.

There is no family data on file. Lawrence Thompson settled first in Harrison County, Indiana, coming later to Clay County, where there still reside, and in the adjoining county of Vigo, many descendants of his.

BENJAMIN WHEELER

A statement of his military history as obtained from the U. S. Bureau of Pensions, under date of April 14, 1922, is as follows:

Enlisted, 1777, for 3 months as a Private under Captain Thomas Marshall and Captain Robert Lemon's Companies of Colonel Darby Lux's Maryland Regiment.

Enlisted, 1777, for 4 months, in Captain William Philip's company.

Engaged in skirmishes with Indians.

Residence of soldier at enlistment—enlisted in Baltimore, Maryland.

Date of application for pension, Oct. 29, 1833. His claim was allowed.

Residence at date of application, Clay County, Indiana.

Age at date of application, born, 1758 in Baltimore County Maryland.

There was no family data on file.

It will be noted that Benjamin Wheeler and Lawrence Thompson made their applications for pensions on the same day. They were closely allied by family ties. Lawrence Thompson's daughter, Frances, married Thomas Wheeler, son of Benjamin. This Thomas Wheeler was a soldier in the War of 1812. Any persons who can trace their parentage to Thomas Wheeler and Frances Thompson will be eligible to membership in the present day Revolutionary Societies (D. A. R. and S. A. R.) on two counts, on both the Thompson and the Wheeler lines.

Many descendants of the patriot, Benjamin Wheeler, are residing today in Brazil and Clay County. His burial place is in the Sloan or Zenor Cemetery, near Bowling Green. His grave should be sought.

JOHN YOCUM

John Yocum lies buried in the old Reffett family burying ground, on the South Forest Avenue road, two miles south of Brazil. His grave is un-marked, as, indeed, all of the graves now are in that old family plot. What stones were there have fallen over, and may not be lying now upon the exact spot where once they stood. I visited the place in March, 1921. There was none of the prostrate stones that gave any information concerning the man Yocum, whose last resting place I earnestly sought. The outlines of but very few graves could be definitely determined. Possibly one of these by which I stood was the sepulchre of the man who had fought with the struggling colonists for their independence and for the birth of this glorious republic of ours. In any event, I bared my head in that lonely spot, as one who stood on holy ground.

The old Reffett burying ground is situated on a knoll, at the southwest corner of the cross roads, two miles from Brazil, on the South Forest Avenue road. Just over the fence, the ground is low and marshy with some growth of underbrush and small trees. Proceeding diagonally through this piece of ground, you climb gradually to higher ground, and come to the summit of a small knoll, marked by an evergreen tree. This is the site of the ancient burial plot, and it is so nearly obliterated, that one might not detect it, if he were not especially searching for it.

The man Yocum was living in Posey Township in 1840, at the age of 96. So says the Pension list of 1840. His pension record I thought I had, but if so, it has been mislaid. I have written to the Bureau of Pensions for another copy of his service, and will submit it as a supplement to this paper, when I have received it.

Is there no-one yet living, who once knew the exact location in the old cemetery of John Yocum's grave, and who can come forward at this late day, and before it is too late, and provide this information?

We have now spoken all we know concerning the 13 Revolutionary

soldiers whose names were listed at the beginning of this paper. In the writer's judgment the next thing that should be done is to pay a visit to the various early-day cemeteries and private family burying grounds, in an intensive search for traces of these patriots' graves. Let us reclaim and preserve them with suitable markers, before their obliteration is complete.

Just before removing from Brazil, the writer was preparing for a thorough survey of the old cemeteries in the vicinity of Bowling Green. I had correspondence with a gentleman down that way who stated that there were seven or eight such cemeteries, most of them within two miles of Bowling Green. It was my intention to thoroughly search all of them, spending as many days as might be necessary to accomplish the purpose; but my removal to Indianapolis at about that time, prevented.

I would like yet to do it, and I believe results would obtain. If the Clay County Historical Society's committee is planning a trip of this character to the Bowling Green vicinity, I would like to beg in on it, and can place myself in Brazil for an early morning start, on most any morning after August 1st.

Mr. Jacoby Luther, former Clay County Commissioner, is authority for the statement that two Revolutionary soldiers were buried at "Staunton" What old cemeteries are there in that vicinity? I one day visited the old Vest Cemetery, just to the southeast of Staunton, and found it to be old indeed, quite bramble grown and neglected. I read the inscription on every stone, but not one of the stones (from their dates could possibly have marked the grave of a Revolutionary soldier. But graves there were, of very ancient appearance, some entirely unmarked, and others with rude sandstone slabs revealing no inscription that could be read. What aged resident of that vicinity lives today, who can tell us about these ancient graves, and who it was that was laid away to rest within them?

Another old Clay County cemetery visited by the writer is the Tade Cemetery, lying about two miles to the northeast of Cory. One fine day in September, 1921. I patrolled every square foot of this old cemetery, visiting every headstone

and reading dates thereon. This was a rather difficult task on account of the place being so overgrown with weeds and brambles; but I made quite a complete investigation of the spot, particularly so, because the late Mr. Silas Foulke had said that there was a soldier of the Revolution buried there.

In the whole cemetery, I found but one headstone whose dates would indicate that the occupant of the grave had been born early enough to have participated in the Revolutionary War. This was the grave of one John Reece, who was born in 1768 and died in 1842. But there were old graves there, that were not marked, and others, the inscriptions upon whose headstones had long since yielded to the erosion of the elements, and could no longer speak the name of the one who lay buried there or tell the dates of his coming and going. It was not long after this that Mr. Silas Foulke died, and before I had opportunity to inquire further of him regarding the patriot whom he seemed to believe was buried in the old Tade burying ground.

Other old cemeteries visited by the writer, and thoroughly searched for Revolutionary graves, are the Modesitt Cemetery, about two miles south of Brazil on the Water-works road, in the southwest corner of the cross-roads; the cemetery on the National Road just west of "Billtown," and the old Hill Cemetery in Brazil, on West National Ave.

This, then, is the tabulation of facts thus far gleaned pertaining to the soldiers of the War of the Revolution in Clay County, Indiana, and the sum total of all knowledge that has been published on the subject, down to the present time.

Let it be added to by additional information obtained by a thorough research and investigation, not longer postponed. We may yet be able to reclaim a few of these sacred spots, which, in another year, may be entirely obliterated and lost. It is quite possible that we shall not be able to get a bit further in the location of the graves of our Revolutionary dead, than did those worthy searchers of 1906, who completed their effort by the marking of the graves of but two veterans of the Revolution. But let us try. Let us visit every cemetery in the county, and every private family burial plot of which knowledge yet remains.

SOLDIERS - IND.

And if, as a reward of such effort and such labor, we shall some day find ourselves standing beside the grave, well authenticated and fully proven, of some patriot who endured privation and faced death, in the cause of those struggling colonists who fought for the preservation of "certain inalienable rights" and for that independence which gave to us this glorious country of ours; if, I say, we shall find ourselves standing by the grave of such a one, let us feel that the ground whereon we stand is holy ground, and let us reclaim the spot before it is forever lost.

To one who loves his country fervently, and reveres sincerely, the memory of those who fought for its establishment, there is much of satisfaction in this work of reclamation, and when the spot has been cleared, the briars and the brambles cut away, and the spot been suitably marked for permanent preservation, one is moved to repeat those lines so fitting.

"Rest on, embalmed and sainted dead!

Dear as the blood ye gave;
No impious footsteps here shall tread

The herbage of your grave;
Nor shall your glory be forgot
While Fame her record keeps,
Or Honor points the hallowed spot
Where Valor proudly sleeps.

Yon marble minstrel's voiceless stone

In deathless song shall tell,
When many a vanished age hath flown,

The story how ye fell;
Nor wreck, nor change, nor winter's blight.

Nor Time's remorseless doom,
Shall dim one ray of glory's light
That gilds your deathless tomb."